

Work Zone Safety and Mobility Public Information and Outreach Strategies

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As part of a comprehensive approach to traffic management, work-zone safety, and driver engagement projects, the Arizona Department of Transportation Communication and Community Partnerships Division develops public information and outreach plans in conjunction with Transportation Management Plans (TMP).

Public Involvement and Outreach Overview

The Communication and Community Partnerships Division (CCP) follows the agency's strategic objectives. CCP's vision is "Driven to get people where they want to go." The division's mission is "To Engage the Community in Arizona's Transportation Solutions." In addition to the ADOT values, CCP specifically embraces innovation, commitment, transparency, and trustworthiness in working with all stakeholders. Annual performance measurements for the division emanate from four strategic focus areas:

- Customers – Build positive relationships with customers
- Processes – Develop operational rigor
- Services – Provide "best practices" transportation communication services
- People – Create fulfilling, high-performance culture

Public Involvement / Community Relations Sections

CCP's combined Public Involvement and Community Relations sections, representing groups for statewide districts and the Phoenix districts respectively, are primarily responsible for the communication aspects of public involvement, local government relations, community relations, and media relations. Agency staff and teams of consultants, often referred to as consortiums, are embedded into each project to ensure that the agency's public participation requirements and objectives are met.

Communication and Public Involvement

In general, our fundamental premise is that ADOT should provide an environment for meaningful public participation (including for those with disabilities or language challenges). Openness to the public furthers the agency's mission by increasing our credibility and improving our decision making, while also ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Work Zone Safety and Mobility policies and best practices. The willingness of department staff and consultants to remain open to new ideas from constituents, and to incorporate those suggestions where appropriate, is essential to the execution of our mission. At the same time, we should not accord privileged status to any special interest, nor accept any recommendation or proposal without careful, critical examination.

With the public, communication is but one aspect of a comprehensive outreach effort. The Arizona Department of Transportation Communication and Community Partnership Division fully embraces the principles of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). To that end, ADOT subscribes to the Core Values for Public Participation (IAP2, 2008):

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Within construction projects, these principles dictate the inclusion of the public in the development of Traffic Management Plans, construction communication, and traffic-management outreach strategies. ADOT's CCP employs Transportation System Management (TSM) meetings before and during construction projects to accomplish this objective. These meetings includes diverse stakeholders – public safety, businesses, contractor, hospitals, social services, schools, neighborhood groups, municipalities, and other groups relevant to the corridor – to review traffic-management issues, propose alternatives and discuss community implications. The groups also aid in the communication of concerns to the project team and support outreach of construction-related issues.

Integrated Communication

Integrated communication drives strategies across all segments of any organization. Everything an organization does — and sometimes what it does not do — sends a message. The communication elements of ADOT's Work Zone Safety and Mobility policy are based on the principles of integrated communication and the fundamental assumption that the Communication and Community Partnerships Division is responsible for a primary function of the agency's long-range and day-to-day operations.

Integrated communication is designed to increase ADOT's effectiveness and value by strengthening relationships with all stakeholders — to include the agency's employees, leaders, Transportation Board members, public officials, news media, and community leaders. Integration within the organization leverages all available resources and broadens the scope of communication effort to achieve strategic consistency.

Public Involvement Policy Statement

ADOT recognizes that decisions are improved by engaging citizens and other stakeholder groups, and is committed to transparent and inclusive processes that are responsive, accountable, and within ADOT's resources and ability to finance. ADOT assigns a high priority to appropriately informing and involving citizens and other stakeholders throughout a roadway work project in which ADOT decisions impact their lives.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum clearly shows that differing levels of participation are acceptable, depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern or interest surrounding work project. Most important, however, is the realization that each participation level includes a promise to the public. Expectations for the level of participation, appropriate for each decision, must be understood between the public and ADOT. When ADOT begins a communication and public participation process, the purpose and promise will be clarified at the onset. According to IAP2, the public participation levels are, in order from minimum to full involvement, are:

1. Inform
2. Consult
3. Involve
4. Collaborate
5. Empower

While it is important for the project team to consider the interests of the public and take steps to effectively involve the communities or constituencies that will be most impacted by ADOT's decisions, it is not necessary for all public or stakeholder participation activities to have extensive involvement. However, lack of adequate participation or lack of effective means for participation can result in agreements or policies that do not necessarily reflect the interests of communities or constituencies that will be most impacted by them.

The project team should make all reasonable efforts to ensure that the public is informed and given appropriate opportunities for participation. Those opportunities should not be judged solely by their quantity; but also by whether they are designed to improve the quality of ADOT's project outreach. Not every project will require a high degree of public participation. A CCP staff member with knowledge of the community and trained in the IAP2 principles can be an important project ally and public involvement plan architect.

Media Relations

Because of the intense interest from members of the traveling public in Arizona's transportation challenges and solutions, contacts with the media are a common and valuable means for CCP to communicate the department's work to the public. Active and comprehensive media relations activities are most critical during roadway work projects to help inform drivers of temporary changes in traffic flow, to promote safety at work sites, and to minimize the impact the disruption has on communities. Some of these media contacts may be initiated by a representative of the media or by an ADOT public information officer. While media relations are important to the department's efforts, they should not be viewed as the agency's only method of informing or involving the public.

One of the key roles of the Communication and Community Partnership Division is media relations. In addition to staff in Phoenix, a public information officer is assigned to each ADOT District to facilitate communication with or to members of the local, state, and national media. Thus, all communication with the media should be coordinated through the appropriate public information officer; members of the media can also call the media line at 800-949-8057. The assigned public information officer will work in collaboration with project staff to solidify key messages for the project and deliver those message to the media. In general, consultants and contractors should not speak on behalf of a project or the department unless specifically authorized.

In general, the media shall be viewed as an important partner in any project and used as a resource to effectively reach more members of an affected community. Media requests should always be addressed quickly, professionally, and with a keen sense of accuracy aligned to the immediate and strategic agency initiatives.

General Public Communication

Many segments of “the public” may have a particular interest in ADOT roadway work or may be affected by those projects. In addition to individual Arizona residents and visitors, “the public” includes, but is not limited to:

- representatives of consumer, environmental, and other advocacy groups;
- Native Americans and tribal governments;
- minority and ethnic groups;
- business and industrial interests, including small businesses;
- elected and appointed public officials;
- the media;
- trade, industrial, agricultural, and labor organizations;
- public health, scientific, and professional representatives and societies;
- civic and community associations;
- faith-based organizations;
- research, university, education, and governmental organizations and associations;
- governments, and agencies at all levels.

Though every person living or traveling in Arizona is an ultimate beneficiary of ADOT work projects, a relatively small number of individuals directly participate in ADOT activities. Public agencies such as the Federal Highway Administration or regional Associations of Government (COGs and MPOs) may have a variety of roles. They may be regulators, beneficiaries of public participation in their own decision-making processes, as well as stakeholder groups that provide input into ADOT’s decisions; these groups can be vital in the development of local-specific Work Zone Safety and Mobility policy communication and outreach techniques. As the most connected, and most engaged members of a project-specific community, members of the groups listed above can become important ambassadors for work projects

and can serve a vital function in providing feedback and input to the project team through regular, informal meetings.

Public participation can include any level of contact with the public in helping to shape a work zone project. It includes processes to communicate with and gather input from the public and then using that input to make better decisions. Some projects only may require that the public be informed (newspaper advertising, door hangers), while others may need to fully collaborate or partner with the public to result in a good, safe project (community advisory teams, transportation systems management team meetings).

In the public sector, a comprehensive public participation program may include a variety of techniques that can engage diverse audiences with varying levels of interest. It may also involve a combination of community relations efforts, working with the media, as well as involving elected and appointed officials whose constituents are affected by a project. In short, public participation enables the public to work with ADOT and hold it accountable for its decisions. Examples of such efforts may include:

- Message points for staff to respond to inquiries from residents;
- Transportation System Management (TSM) meetings with community leaders included;
- Project hotlines and e-mail addresses, with work zone signage;
- Proactive media relations;
- Regular updates to community and civic leaders to create project ambassadors

Communication and outreach efforts must keep in mind the diversity of stakeholders and ensure that methods of communication meet the needs of those individuals/groups. To be effective, communication must meet the audience directly, in a collaborative and approachable manner. Interpreters, alternative-language materials and presentation styles may need to be considered when communicating with some stakeholder groups.

Project Communication and Outreach Tactics

Most communication with the public will be on specific projects through written communication, public information meetings, informal community presentations, or conversations with affected individuals. Informational presentations with local governing bodies may be held as needed or requested, as well as formal meetings with elected officials. However, meetings are not a requirement for good public involvement – the need for formal or informal public meetings, like any other outreach strategy – should be based on the needs of the audience, complexity of issues, and community sensitivities/expectations.

While techniques and tactics may be similar among projects, each project will be assessed individually to:

- Detail stakeholders with a focus on types of drivers, affected residents and businesses, public services, and major employers. Some of these stakeholders should be included in Transportation System Management (TSM) meetings; others will be invitees to public meetings or recipients of printed materials.
- Determine the scale and pattern of potential traffic disruption on both the mainline and arterial streets. Impacts to public safety and public transit services should be considered.

- Identify community sensitivities. These issues may be political, educational, social, or otherwise of concern to some or all members of the community. To the extent possible, these sensitivities should be acknowledged, addressed and, if feasible, mitigated during the project.
- Identify communication strategies and techniques most appropriate for drivers, businesses, community members and other local stakeholders, giving attention to language, access, and the needs of other special populations. Different means of communicating with affected communities should be considered to ensure that quality connections are made (i.e. not all efforts made via the Internet).
 - Representative communication techniques include printed alerts, hotlines, e-mail updates, podcasts, media relations, advertising, direct mail, door hangers, open-house meetings, Web sites, community briefings, local government coordination.
- Articulate key messages for the project, taking both a strategic and tactical view of the project. Message identification should chart the stages of the project and anticipate potential issues and successes. Messages, in general, should address
 - 1) Safety
 - 2) Plan Ahead
 - 3) Driver Awareness (traffic management changes)
 - 4) Agency Responsiveness.
- Forge partnerships with other organizations that shall help to shape and communicate a public outreach message.
- Use TSM meetings to forge relationships and instill a culture of collaboration between adjoining projects, moving beyond a basic communication role to support technical excellence by the agency. By bringing together resident engineers, local traffic engineering departments, contractors, traffic control specialists and others, individual or in-series projects will present a coordinated front for members of the driving public and the community, showcasing that ADOT operates as a cohesive agency. Such coordination should yield safer experiences for drivers and workers.

Outreach/Communication Budget

There is no formula for how much to spend for communication and project outreach. Often, small to mid-size projects can be handled through the efforts of ADOT's Communication and Community Partnerships staff, who specialize in media relations and community engagement for each of ADOT's districts. More complex projects, however, may require dedicated resources to conduct public meetings, produce business fliers, place newspaper advertising or distribute door hangers. Thus, budget allocations can range from \$5,000 to \$100,000 for construction efforts depending on the scope, impact, disruption to traffic and sensitivities of the local community. Communication and Community Partnership Division staff will work collaboratively with project teams to, in advance, identify the IAP2 level of public involvement and the associated budget required to successfully notify and engage the general public, drivers and other stakeholders.

Measurement / Assessment of Available Data

Measuring and assessing public input/interest/sentiment and making changes to outreach efforts based on that data is a critical element of any work zone public outreach effort. For low- to high-significance projects, data may be collected via:

- Log of phone calls, documenting issue/question;
- Newspaper coverage, letters to editor, and other media coverage;
- Public attendance at meetings;
- Number of speaker requests and attendance at civic presentations;
- Correspondence to district, field or administrative offices on the project;
- Number of different VMS/DMS messages provided to drivers;
- Number of proactive communication efforts (eg. newspaper ads, handbills, e-mails);
- Informal interactions between project staff and community members/drivers;
- Attendance at TSM meetings and minutes of those meetings.

In general, data collection will be completed by CCP and consultants supervised by CCP PIOs. Reporting on identified metrics will be completed on a regular basis by the PIOs on a scheduled agreed to by the project team. Data summaries shall also be archived to document the relative success of a project and illustrate lessons learned to support future efforts.

The volume of public interest for a project is not a definitive indicator of successful or unsuccessful outreach strategies; rather, the degree of public input and participation demonstrates the level of relative engagement. Formal recording, reporting and analysis of that data can place it into an appropriate perspective to document successful strategies or project phases, and those phases that pose greater challenge to the driving public. It is important for projects of any size to formally collect and analyze various data from the public to help identify community-based solutions to improve outreach and communication, with each project taking a best-practices approach based on previous lessons.

Furthermore, formal and informal public comment is critical for helping project staff to identify and resolve possible safety issues, work zone confusion or traffic flow concerns. It is recommended that such input from the public be seriously assessed and, when appropriate, action taken in response to this input. Drivers provide valuable data back to a project team and should be encouraged to become part of the “work zone solution.”